

Some Conclusions of Extension Soil Conservationists' Conference, Spring Mill State Park, Mitchell, Indiana, October 9, 10, 11, 1950.



The New Concept of Conservation and the Job Ahead.

The concept of conservation as a way of life is a new and different one for many people. Even today there are many people living who helped cut down the vast timberland areas and broke the virgin sods of its plains. People, however, generally realize that drastic changes in land care must take place. More and more farms are being committed to conservation farming. This changed land use pattern is causing a realignment of labor, finance, livestock and crop enterprises. Conservation farmers are seeking help in making such adjustments. "Helping farm people help themselves" is a fundamental objective of Extension work. Few programs offer a greater opportunity for people to help themselves than does soil conservation.

Extension soil conservationists, subject matter specialists, administrators and county extension workers, will be required to go even farther in years ahead in aiding this shift in the land use pattern. Changed attitudes and new abilities on the part of farmers are to be developed. To meet such needs and to provide education necessary in order to maintain public interest and to bring about action places an increased burden on Extension.

The Extension program for soil conservation education should reach all people. Special interests of men, women and youth, in urban as well as rural areas, should be considered.

Development of nearly six million conservation farmers is the primary objective of soil conservation activities at this time. To help bring this about, State Extension Services should:

1. Help land owners and operators become aware of land and water conservation problems in local areas not yet organized as soil conservation districts.
2. Condition farmers to become district cooperators.
3. Help farmers in districts who are undertaking a program of conservation farming to make the necessary adjustments in their farming operations.
4. Develop and carry out an educational program for the public at large, including urban people, regarding the values of soil conservation and the part that each person and group can play in getting the job done.

Teaching of Conservation in the Schools.

The Extension Soil Conservationist is in a position to give important assistance in promoting the teaching of conservation in the Nation's schools. Such assistance may be:

1. Creating interest and activity on the part of teachers.
2. Providing teaching materials and suggestions on possible soil conservation activities.
3. Assisting with planning in-service training for teachers to be given by educational institutions and through locally conducted training activities.

Direct responsibility of training and preparing teachers, and decisions on teaching methods should remain with the educational agencies. Extension's contribution should be largely with promotion, planning and guidance and supplying appropriate materials in the soil conservation field.

It is recognized that district governing bodies can be very influential in stimulating interest in the need for teaching conservation in the elementary and secondary schools.

Making Extension Work in Soil Conservation More Effective in State and Local Areas.

Effective programs for soil conservation education in the States and districts must be based upon the social and economic needs of the people as well as the physical needs of the soil and its agriculture. The State and district programs and work plans should be used as a working guide. They should be kept current.

Extension's educational program must be geared to the changing conditions caused by adjustments resulting from better land use and conservation farming systems. When farmers shift to systems of better land use and conservation farming, they will find new problems such as utilization of forage crops, adaptation of mechanical equipment, and shifts in livestock enterprises. The resources of Extension and the Land Grant Colleges will be needed to a greater extent than ever before in helping meet these problems.

Assistant county agents in conservation on a district or small area basis have proven valuable in speeding up the soil conservation educational programs.

The time has come to appraise and evaluate our educational programs and test out new methods and techniques, keeping in mind that mass educational media will reach more people with less man-hours of effort than any other extension tool.

The early responsibility of extension soil conservationists was to help bring soil conservation districts into being. This job is nearly completed. He has helped develop soil conservation district programs and plans, with which many other specialists have helped. Today the job of the extension soil conservationist is primarily that of a specialist in soil conservation education who helps bring educational resources to bear within the programs of soil conservation districts. Subject matter specialists of the Extension Service have an enlarged field of specialization when it is recognized that all agricultural programs are geared to land capabilities. Improved techniques and methods will speed up learning about land care. There are opportunities to help other educational institutions see and play their proper part.

Opportunities for Assisting Governing Bodies.

How well the districts turn out "practicing conservation farmers" rests in a large measure upon the vision and crusading activities of the governing bodies. Extension has a clear responsibility for helping train members of the district governing body to understand their duties and how to carry them out and to recognize the broader phases of the district program. Extension's effort can not cease until board members -- experienced and newly elected ones -- bring

all devices to bear upon the essential objective of rendering conservation contagious and accepted in practice. To hasten that attainment, "education for conservation" must be built into and made an organic part of the county's total Extension program.

Extension Work in Soil Conservation With Young People — 4-H Clubs, F. F. A., Young Men and Women and Others.

One of the biggest opportunities of Extension education in soil conservation is work with young people. This is largely because of the idealism of youth. Even after ten or more years of Extension work with youth in soil conservation, participation is relatively small. Recent changes, however, give promise of strengthening this work. The principal changes recognize age groupings, leadership training, and more emphasis on individual and group activities rather than projects.

Projects in 4-H Club soil conservation are difficult to develop and usually lack the appeal that is found in livestock and crops projects. On the other hand, opportunities for enlisting participation by young people in soil conservation activities are not surpassed in any other phase of youth interests.

Opportunities exist for wide and varied appeal to groups as well as individuals. Extension work with youth should become a part of Extension assistance to soil conservation districts.

Opportunities for Soil Conservation Program Improvement Through Research.

It is important that district officials and farmers at large understand that successful soil and water conservation is based on results of research work. Extension soil conservationists need to arrange ways and means for them to see and understand what is being done in soil conservation research. At the same time, research workers can benefit from visits with farmers at the experiment stations and on field tours that enable them to learn first hand the problems that farmers are facing in soil and water conservation.

It is recognized that a sound program of soil conservation research must provide for fundamental research that is usually of a long term nature as well as practical research to meet specific and sometimes urgent needs.

There is, however, much valuable research information available that is not fully used. Wider use of applicable information can be obtained if findings are interpreted and published in suitable form for use by Extension workers with farmers.

Better understanding of what is being done and what can be done in soil conservation research will facilitate analysis of research needs locally and by broad problem areas so that a sound and adequate program of research can be developed. District governing officials can give helpful support in presenting needs for research to administrators and legislative bodies concerned.

Some Related Programs and Activities That Offer Opportunities in Soil Conservation Education.

In every district there are tremendous possibilities of leadership and services which can be used in solving the soil conservation problem. The soil conservation district is in an excellent position to coordinate these efforts within the district. We can well afford to encourage district directors to marshall these forces. The focal point is to develop conservation programs which include all individuals and groups who have a contribution to make. Good public relations will be necessary to establish the best pattern of operations for those concerned and with ample credit given to those who participate.

Extension Activities Dealing with Technology and Balance in Agriculture as Related to Soil Conservation.

Extension Soil Conservationists should develop and promote a balanced soil and water conservation program based upon the capabilities of the land, proven research data and with enough field trials to be sure it will be successful.

During the past few years some well intentioned people have made lavish claims for soil conservation. They have promoted programs which have not been fully demonstrated by research or have not been found economically possible under field conditions. Examples include disease control of animals by the establishment of the proper minerals in the soil; organic farming without supplying depleted minerals, etc. Continued emphasis on such ill-considered programs may eventually undermine public confidence in soil conservation.

Soil Conservation Extension Work With Women.

One of the most undeveloped phases of extension work in soil conservation is with farm women. Actually they should be and usually are fully as interested in the food needs and the financial security of the family as the husbands. Some experiences of soil conservation education activities with women were mentioned, such as (1) women meeting in their homes to discuss the subject with a speaker and discussion.

- (2) Inviting the wives to the group discussion and farm conservation planning meetings.
- (3) Organization of groups such as in one district where women formed a "Daughters of the Soil."
- (4) The addition of a soil conservation study lesson in the Home Economics local leader training program.

There is a need for the assembling of suitable soil conservation material for use with women's groups. Programs need to be developed and tested in the field.

Training Extension and Soil Conservation Workers for Soil Conservation Education.

Training is a continuous need in most organizations. For Extension workers perhaps the greater needs are an understanding of the technology of conservation and of farm conservation planning itself. Soil Conservation Service people often need additional training in educational methodology. This is especially true of new workers. Field work is to be regarded as the more favorable setting for doing either. Coincident with the proposed training should go a

deliberate effort to formulate a working arrangement between Soil Conservation Service and Extension workers in order to effect a oneness of impact.

In training — and in all other educational activity — two basic facts should be continuously emphasized:

1. Agricultural programs are sound when they are geared to capabilities of the land.
2. Soil and water conservation is basic to the welfare of all people — urban or rural — men, women and young people.

In the light of these facts, every Extension Specialist and, for that matter, every agricultural worker, has an inherent interest in and responsibility for the use and care of land and water resources.

The following people attended the conference:

W. R. Tascher, Extension Soil Conservationist, Extension Service, Washington, D.C.
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